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ABSTRACT

The Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota were established with the intent of gathering the records of the diverse agencies and national associations that make up the private or independent social welfare sector. The collection documents life in urban settings and focuses on social behavior that is often neglected in standard historical coverage. The documents provide details about what conditions existed and describe programs designed to move communities forward. A variety of materials is included: local and national needs assessments, quantitative surveys and reports by field observers, case records of social service clients, committee proposals for projects dealing with social problems, board minutes, publications, and correspondence among leaders in the field of social welfare. Documents can shed light on child-rearing habits and can lead to analysis of the material and ideological components of urban lower class homemaking. They provide examples of citizen groups and agencies struggling over time with the same social concerns troubling the nation today. Reports describe work with neglected children over time and include socio-economic data on these client populations. Travelers' Aid records provide demographics of the transient population from the past. Documents reveal common experiences in U.S. cities throughout the twentieth century. They show the importance of volunteerism in social welfare issues and highlight the role of women in such activities. Urban race relations are addressed as well. This material provides the opportunity for reaching greater historical accuracy about urban conditions and understanding the values that motivated the design of social welfare programs. (GEA)

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SOCIAL WELFARE HISTORY ARCHIVES:

A SOURCE FOR THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

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Presentation as Part of
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SOCIAL WELFARE HISTORY ARCHIVES:
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Introduction

Early in the century mothers living in New York City's poor neighborhoods participated in empirical research measuring the child welfare merits of breast feeding versus purchased milk. What began as an argument among experts concerned with causes of infant mortality evolved into a network of milk stations organized by the Milk Committee of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, one of the city's oldest charity and social service agencies. These stations combined cheap milk from monitored, sanitary production centers, with the availability of prenatal and infant health care under the administration of Wilbur Phillips. For him, this urban health program had a less tangible - and more important - component as well - citizens could share democratically in the development of local and responsive neighborhood services.

Ideally, dairies for the production and distribution of milk could be operated on a cooperative basis and a mother would endorse the milk station/health center as her own and share in its governance. The intent of middle class social reformers to prevent social problems - in this case infant mortality and illness, the organization they structured for delivery of social services - the milk stations and encouragement to new dairy processes, the involvement of the "recipient" poor with defined needs and theory about the potential of citizen participation, are all stories that can be told from the primary documents in the Wilbur Phillips Collection at the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota..

These Archives were established in the early 1960s with the intent of gathering the records of the diverse agencies and national associations that make up what is variously defined as the voluntary, the private or independent social welfare sector. Taken together the records document social conditions across the United States and reveal the activities and accomplishments that engaged thousands of people who sought to respond to social need and civic problems throughout the twentieth century.

The range of collections is diverse including the papers of such groups the YMCA, the National Federation of Settlements, the American Recreation Association, the Child Welfare League of the United States, and Travelers Aid, organizations which fostered and linked social service programs in communities across the country and in some cases across the globe. Another set of holdings comes from professional organizations, the National Association of Social Work and Council on Social Work Education, and from organizations intending to influence social policy rather than provide service, for example the National Social Welfare Assembly and American Public Welfare Association. The Archives also has the personal as well as professional papers of prominent women and men whose work shaped private agencies and influenced public sector activity, persons such as Wilbur Phillips and better known - Helen Hall, long time head resident of Henry Street Settlement in New York City and Paul Kellogg, editor of the Survey, the most prominent national magazine covering social welfare issues for the first half of the century.

These collections hold a variety of materials: local and national needs assessments, quantitative surveys and reports by observers in the field, case records of social service clients, committee proposals for projects dealing with social problems, board minutes, publications, and correspondence

among leaders in the field of social welfare. Thus far many of the dissertations, articles and books that have been generated wholly or in part from the Archives, have been in the field of social welfare history - institutional development, social policy, social work/welfare ethics or biography. But this only begins to tap the material. available. A dissertation based on a few hundred case records generated at the Minneapolis Family and Children's Service (formerly the city's Charity Organization Society) examines dynamics in female-headed households to understand the "feminization of poverty" prior to the Great Depression. A source for studying women's lives, these case records also provided quantifiable information and intimate qualitative detail about relations in poor neighborhoods, kin networks, residential mobility, unemployment rates, child labor, use of city services - all issues on the urban history agenda. Among the provocative findings in these records was the degree to which those with power - in this case a professional agency with an upper class board and middle class staff - could and could not influence the vulnerable and sometimes desperate lower class. This of course is the theoretical issue of social control that interests many in social history.

With collections at the Social Welfare History Archives - as with all primary sources - one must ask who created the document and for what audience. Yet regardless of the moral assumptions of the persons authoring documents, taking minutes, or assessing activity, the earliest leaders in social welfare put great faith in objective materials about populations and urban circumstances and established a pattern of conscientious data collection that continues to this day. Using the Phillips Collection and others as examples, it is possible to illustrate how materials classified as "social welfare" can help create a thicker, denser understanding of urban life that includes an

understanding of community health and welfare needs, of the actions of those who sought responsibility in shaping civic life, and the nature of programs they introduced to urban life.

THE URBAN LESSONS IN ONE COLLECTION

Records in the Phillips Collection can shed light on the child rearing habits of women who carried youngsters and empty milk pails to the stations and can lead to an analysis of the material and ideological components of urban homemaking for the lower class.. Operation of the station and clinic points to organization, decision making and class relations between households and those wielding power within the neighborhood and those sitting in offices downtown. Formulation of the theoretical concept of urban democracy and its actual limited success can be traced from Phillips' work at the New York City Milk Committee to Milwaukee where he headed the Child Welfare Commission during that city's years of socialist control, and then to Cincinnati where his work claimed national attention.

Between 1917-1919 Phillip's ideas were the basis of an experiment known as the Cincinnati Social Unit Plan in the Mohawk-Brighton area. Middle and lower class residents living there (whose names are still available) formed councils for participation in decision making for health and education.services. The Social Unit Plan intended to recapture the values of village life in a conflict ridden urban setting and it attracted backing from prominent figures such as Gifford Pinchot, Abraham Flexner, and Herbert Croly. The national press followed the program's development and local citizens supported it but too many officials deemed it a "dangerous type of socialism" and by 1919 the experiment had ended. However, the citizen

participation it celebrated was legislated years later into the Community Action Programs in the War on Poverty. (This relationship is explored by Anatole Shaffer, "The Cincinnati Social Unit Experiment: 1917-1919," Social Service Review 45 ,1971,159-172). While many perceived Phillips as a hopeless dreamer, if not a radical, and the CAP agencies of the War on Poverty are often given similar evaluation, the concerns they sought to address continue to be real.

URBAN SOCIAL PROBLEMS REPEAT THEMSELVES

With few exceptions, contemporary urban problems and their attempted solutions appear not to be new. The Archives' collections are replete with examples of citizen groups and agencies documenting and struggling over time with a litany of social concerns little different from those still troubling - or again troubling - the nation. The papers of the United Neighborhood Houses of New York City systematically describe the poor housing, unemployment, educational level and need in that city's diverse ethnic neighborhoods . The United Way of Minneapolis collection has decades of reports on juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy and the dilemma of integrating new groups into the city- whether they were veterans back from war, native Americans from reservations, or Japanese from internment camps. And in words that could be repeated today, the chairwoman of the United Way's Committee on Transients telegrammed Robert Wagner chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 1936 , saying "It is paramount that the Transient Problem be recognized in the relief plank of the democratic platform...This is a deep seated and continuing problem."

The clearest lesson from an overview of the Archives is that every identified urban problem has a history that includes some citizen concern and organization for action. The second lesson is that cities across the United States not only had social welfare concerns in common but that local civic and social welfare groups were linked in national organizations that set standards and gave direction and encouragement to program ideas. Urban history usually deals with individual cities, or cities rooted in regions defined by economics but because many national organizations regularly and systematically collected materials from member agencies in locations throughout the country and over decades, the Archives allows the urban equivalent of longitudinal studies and cross cultural analysis of social factors.

CITIES SHARED EXPERIENCES ACROSS SPACE

In the Family Service Association of America collection reports from member agencies in fifty different cities described work with neglected children over time and reports included social and economic data on these client populations. The National Social Welfare Assembly assessed racial composition and sensitivity in 88 children's summer camps in 33 different communities. The collection of the National Recreation Association includes annual detailed reports on recreational facilities all over the continent and a limited set of surveys on client aspirations in Sheltered Workshops from various cities. The American Social Hygiene (later Health) Association collected statistics on venereal disease in urban settings. The National Federation of Settlements includes housing surveys. Travelers' Aid records provide demographics of the transient population from the past and many collections document unemployment during the Great Depression. and the recessions that preceded and followed it. One city can be followed through

many collections and a detailed picture created of its population, their problems, the services they had access to, and the attitudes that governed the allocation of "help." Perhaps more importantly cities can be compared to one another. Not only cities, but towns - for example Huron, South Dakota; Sequin, Texas; Boise, Idaho can be compared and contrasted to determine how homogenized or individualized was the urban culture.

Over time multiple civic groups have studied adolescents and written reports about the behavior of young people. Such studies from a particular location could be correlated with economic and political facts about the same place drawn from other sources. Or the impact of an event such as prohibition on adolescent activity in Sheboygan, Wisconsin could be contrasted with that in New York City. Delinquency and crime - or venereal disease and prostitution - could be weighed for the symbolic power they have had in alarming citizens and fostering community studies in diverse locations. The Archives' collections can help answer a set of questions: What social behavior has reappeared in urban settings of diverse size? Are certain problems defined the same throughout the country? Are citizen groups constructing the same surveys, holding the same discussions, and proposing the same remedies?. And how do the attitudes of middle class social welfare groups contrast with the attitudes of the working or lower class? To what degree are social welfare programs welcomed and accepted?

Many of the national organizations that functioned as links were North American, that is, agencies in Canadian cities also were affiliated with groups such as the Recreation Association, and the Family Service Association. Thus the issues of homogeneity and difference in social life can be explored across the national border to result in greater familiarity with "North American" as opposed to the "American" urban experience. Comparing social welfare

experiences in proximate locations can help to refine and qualify a definition of "region."

From 1958 to 1973 the National Social Welfare Assembly in cooperation with the United Community Federation and Council of America sponsored an annual Great Lakes Institute. Coming from midwestern towns like Witchita, Peoria, and Madison,.the heads of welfare departments and United Ways gathered to discuss shared problems and potential solutions as well as current issues. In the late 1950s they debated whether Sputnik would have detrimental impact on the social sciences; in the 1970s they asked themselves if grantsmanship meant "rushing headlong to the federal trough." Records of these meetings not only allow exploration of the degree to which a cohesive Great Lakes region existed practically and ideologically in the dimension of social welfare, but they show how public and private city leaders were forced to deal with issues thrust on them by the times.

CITIES HAVE TO RESPOND TO THE TIMES

The records make clear that whatever individual or regional character a city or town might possess, in the twentieth century national experiences pervade the workings of cities everywhere. The Great Depression and World War Two are understood to be deep and broad in their impact and much is known about both in economic terms; collections at the Archives show in detailed ways how cities and citizens grappled socially with these experiences and integrated them into urban life. For example, from 1931 to 1937 an Emergency Garden Project was conducted in Minneapolis under the auspices of the Family and Children's Service and the Chamber of Commerce. The idea had its roots in the Victory Gardens of World War One, and a settlement house in Columbus, Ohio introduced it again in 1930 and

Minneapolis picked it up from there when it was clear that Washington, D.C. would not provide necessary monies for relief. Measured by numbers of fields toiled and jars of beans canned, the program was a great success; other cities and even a federal bureau wrote asking for instructions.about how to start such a project. However, this "volunteer" effort was not easy, the garden project involved a great deal of staff organization and community donations of land, seed, manure, jars and supervision from the Farm Bureau had to be solicited. And while most families welcomed the opportunity to supplement their food budgets, some citizens "rebelled" - grew flowers or allowed weeds - and had to be "censured."

Behind the existence of every social resource a city might create, need exists in a "client" population or is assumed to exist, and then many anonymous citizens - paid and unpaid - work to determine what has gone wrong and might be made better. And finally, "recipients" of these efforts might disagree. In spite of what historians have determined about patterns of economic or political power in many urban case studies, much is yet to be explored about how cities have worked and the role of human energy in the area of social welfare.

PEOPLE PROVIDING URBAN LEADERSHIP

Every collection in the Archives bears witness to committee meetings at which professionals and volunteers put in thousands of hours talking, planning, disagreeing, and organizing. Often these hours were donated because individuals were committed to a vision of community well being. Yet too often volunteerism has been trivialized as "do gooding" and rejected for serious historical consideration, or interpreted only as "social control." . Some of these collections suggest, however, that regardless of the ideological

intent of those creating or designing social welfare programs, implementation can be difficult. Committees have their own internal problems with communication and policy goes awry, and while "clients" will accept some direction, they will effectively resist other. Aside from the issue of "control", the efforts of social welfare professionals and volunteer citizens as shown in these records enabled many services and resources contributing to what is called the "quality of life." in a community. The civic leadership offered by women and men has to be acknowledged as part of urban activity and understood as one level of decision making in the structure of towns and cities. The collections suggest also that to be a civic or social welfare volunteer has been a "working" role for many middle class women and men, and those actions help to define class differences and practices in urban settings.

Not only have members of the middle class defined and intervened in social welfare issues in a volunteer capacity, but as paid staff, and here records in the Archives attest to the importance of gender. The nurturant character of women and their supposed aptitude for civic housekeeping are a traditional way to define women's relationship to American social welfare. Records from board meetings in local sites, however, show women as equal partners in the give and take of agency discussion.and decision making.with program and budget. While major figures such as Jane Addams were nationally recognized for decades as central in the development of social welfare, it is often assumed that women generally did not succeed in challenging the network of old boys controlling affairs in the professions until the 1970s. However, records from the headquarters of the National Social Welfare Assembly, the Child Study Association, and the Family Service Association of America as examples suggest something else. From the early

century paid female professionals administered these agencies, corresponded across the nation to set up conferences, analyzed social weaknesses through research and asserted what had to be done in response.

A brief example of one woman's influence and activity with male peers is found in material from the National Social Welfare Assembly. When federal policy from the Bureau of Indian Affairs encouraged relocation from reservations to urban areas in the 1950s, the Assembly called together a Committee on the American Indian for the purpose of pushing urban agencies be more responsive and respectful of Indian clients. Helen P. Mudgett from the University of Minnesota quickly became the influential member of the committee. Publications were produced and distributed to urban agencies with information on such matters as tribal authority, the economic plight on reservations, and cultural differences. Mudgett herself designed an intake form for wide distribution that asked social service workers at Community Chest agencies to expand attention to an individual's Indian as well as anglo name, to tribal enrollment, to skills in Indian language and religion. In gratitude for her work, the national director of Community Chest - who was male - wrote to thank her and said, both realistically and apologetically "those of us in the field of community organizing are continually involved in problems of which we know very little."

To understand urban leadership most broadly , the researcher has to look beyond that which is economic or overtly political, to include women - and men - active in various levels of social welfare. People who may or may not have had access to other sources of power. Some cities have secured reputations for themselves through the notoriety of "bad" or corrupt public officials, but in the Archives there are collections illustrating organizations

and individuals pushing for city behavior to the contrary. Some of this can be seen in the professional papers of Fred K. Hoehler, director of the American Public Welfare Association from 1936 - 1943 who then was involved briefly with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Committee before going to live and work in Chicago for approximately 20 years. He began in that city as director of a controversial coalition of community organizations that came together advocating clean government after a public official was murdered and he went on to become executive officer of the Police Board which dealt with disciplinary hearings. among other matters. He directed the Welfare Department and then from 1955-1964 served as an advisor to Mayor Daly on social welfare problems such as delinquency and aging. Chicago city politics as seen in his papers and memorandums is different from the usual characterization of the city.and this raises questions about countervailing forces that add dimension and complicate the analysis of who has influence in a city and what is the collective impact of individuals.

RACE ISSUES AND CONTINUITY OVER TIME

Race relations are an old issue in Chicago and elsewhere. Settlement houses and other agencies documented racial tensions in neighborhoods and some of the organizations discussed here matter of factly separated their services for white and colored. But concern about urban racism and inter-cultural sensitivity also repeated as an agenda item for many organizations. For example, as its mission the Child Study Association of America disseminated information and research about child development and from 1925 to 1935.their Inter-Community Child Study Committee worked to facilitate the emergence of parent education groups in "Negro" communities

after these had been started in white neighborhoods. Middle class black professionals - including physicians and teachers - worked initially with Child Study staff and then in turn led community sessions with other black parents focusing on matters such as habit formation, sex education, and recreational needs. Better child rearing was a goal, but ultimately the pyramiding of learning and teaching was to create "better opportunities for [black] youth." The collection describes the first program that began in Harlem and a second one in Baltimore, but committee records show ongoing questioning among white members on the Committee about their own goals and impact. The Committee wanted the "movement" to belong to the Negroes themselves rather than it being imposed. and they dealt with accusations (from unclear sources) that by organizing black parent groups they were contributing to segregation. No consensus was reached and the Depression ended the experiment. During these same years the National Recreation Association had a Bureau of Colored Work that operated with its own set of newsletters and in 1932 Cincinnati hosted a Colored Work convention dealing with recreation - and unemployment .- The agenda reflected the interests of both black and white youth workers who were "seriously interested" in the "future happiness of Colored youth in America."

Many social welfare groups shared a strategy of surveying community or organizational attitudes toward race and responding with educational materials promoting cross cultural understanding. .For years the Child Study Association constructed and circulated bibliographies of children's books that supported the concept of inter-racial understanding and respect. In the late 1940s the National Social Welfare Assembly translated post war concerns into a Committee on Resettlement of Japanese Americans which wrote and distributed sets of pamphlets for cities, one of

which was titled "Organize Your Community to Meet the Needs of Japanese Americans." In the next decade one of the Assembly's projects was to facilitate the urbanization of Indians as described above. These efforts had an uncertain impact, but they can not be dismissed simply as "white imperialism." They call for exploration of the precipitating conditions and consideration of "enlightened" racial attitudes, leadership, and activity in a racist nation.prior to the 1950s and 60s. The repeated evidence that national organizations recognized certain levels of racism and attempted remedy - though clearly not a civil rights movement - leads to questions about continuity of behavior over time versus traditional periodization of the American experience

Historians teach about civil rights with attention to the Brown versus Board in 1954, the bus boycott of 1955 and the nonviolence culminating in the 1963 March on Washington. These events and the decade that followed focused national media attention on race, yet for decades black organizations such as the Urban League (whose records are not in the Archives) had spoken out against injustice and developed social welfare programs, and as indicated the Archives bears evidence of white dominated organizations identifying race relations as a concern and acting with resources and contacts at their disposal. Just as the leadership role of women in social welfare settings vies with traditional assessment of when women gain access to institutional power, white attention to racism has a local component that in many places precedes the 1950s and 1960s.

To recognize consistencies over time in both social problems and response to them is not to assert a consensus historiography of agreement on principles. Instead it is meant to encourage historians not to overlook the extensive and long term organizational efforts of citizens (many of them elite

women and anonymous homemakers, school teachers and ministers) who identified problems and injustices in society and worked together toward what they defined as improved community life.

The relationship between the Cincinnati Social Unit Plan and the Community Action Program of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty was the first suggestion of continuity over time suggested here. Both programs came under scrutiny and criticism, but the 1960s are different from the 1920s for in the latter period we have clearer access to the critique of the community's minority participants. Monographs have evaluated the War on Poverty but too often without making use of local urban case studies that illustrate what maximum feasible participation actually looked like from the inside. Extensive materials in the Archives from the Ramsey County Action Program enable examination of this for St. Paul, Minnesota.

In that city the mayor called together a mixed group of citizens in November 1964 to explain the "dramatic legislation" of the War on Poverty and potential funding through the Office of Economic Opportunity. By January of 1965 an executive committee had been incorporated, a grant application had been submitted, and racial distrust already had begun owing to the quick "pace versus procedure" and the absence of any black citizens on the central committee. Conflict continued and at the request of members in 1969 the board minutes became actual word for word transcriptions which reveal the difficulty this diverse group of citizens had in creating means to a more just and integrated urban democracy. The minutes for one particular two hour and forty five minute meeting take up over forty pages.and at the end of the evening the Board president paused in the midst of argument to tell the 28 Board members and 31 visitors that ""what we have got here, believe it or not, is 'maximum citizen participation.'"

CONCLUSION

Maximum citizen participation as envisioned by Wilbur Phillips or community action programs has rarely been achieved and the continuing existence of critical social problems in urban settings gives reason to question the clarity and efforts of those who have "participated" in the past. But the city as a unit will be better understood by taking into consideration materials from the Social Welfare History Archives.

These collections document life in urban settings and focus on social behavior that often is neglected in standard historical coverage. They not only provide details about what conditions existed, but they also describe the programs and projects designed to move communities forward. The long term impact of the various organizations' on urban affairs is harder to define, however, and not easily translated into dollars or overt political power. In the Ramsey Action files a memo listing questions for program evaluation shows the hard question, "was the money worth the impact" was crossed off the list. Some agencies' observations carried middle class bias, some projects were poorly conceived, and many lacked sufficient financial support. Often times agencies and associations intended to prevent social problems and prevention has an illusive quality and moreso for the historian. Yet this material enables greater historical accuracy about the objective conditions of urban life and an understanding of the values - responsibility, alarm, optimism - that have motivated the design of social welfare programs and defined segments of the population as professionals, volunteers, or recipients. The collections in the Social Welfare History Archives also testify to the energy many people have invested in understanding urban life.